

Journal Writing: A Study of Change

(Bahar Ulusoglu-Darn and Steve Darn)

Abstract

There is a strong prejudice against writing lessons among Turkish students and teachers, both at high school and university levels. This paper describes the problems that students and teachers have in undergraduate writing classes and suggests journal writing as an alternative approach. The study aims to help to solve some of the problems stemming from students' cultural and educational backgrounds whilst also considering changes and developments observed in different areas of learning and teaching. Each area is dealt with giving examples from students' journal entries, offering the opportunity to study areas of improvement not apparent in the classroom situation. Feedback from students is also considered, providing an insight into their attitude towards journal writing.

Introduction

There have been many changes in approaches to writing in language teaching over the last twenty-five years. These changes are encompassed within two trends: the development of the 'process' approach to writing, and the divergence between 'creative' writing and 'formulaic' academic writing. Meanwhile, there have been complaints about writing courses from both teachers and students. Writing seems to be a neglected area in many course books and in the curriculum as a whole. It is also an area that students are reticent to work on. In this respect Turkish university students are not very different from any other foreign language learners.

Recent changes in language teaching promote language acquisition and literacy, but following or assessing the development of learners is not easy, and the results obtained from different research techniques are not always reliable.

New techniques and methods in language classrooms are mainly developments of the communicative and humanistic schools. However, in teaching writing, the pieces students produce are still 'artificial' and there is very little 'real' purpose for writing. Consequently, it is difficult to talk about achievement in using current methodology in writing classes even when the process approach is used to best effect.

Assessing students work plays an important role in monitoring the learning process, but it is also a problematic area when assessing the writing skill since there are inevitably conflicting ideas about what to focus on in students' pieces. Students produce their final pieces either by copying (as in the traditional approach) or by getting a response from their peers or teacher (as in the process approach). In both, students are led to a point at which they are mainly concerned with form and structure.

The purpose of this study is to see whether journal writing is feasible as an alternative approach to solving the aforementioned problems in writing classes. In the prevailing teaching and learning context it seems appropriate as it provides students with opportunity to express their feelings and ideas as if talking to the teacher. It also seems to provide both teachers and students with a meaningful content in which they have a chance to use writing as a means of communication. Moreover, it removes the stress of "red pen" correction that often has a stultifying effect on writing lessons. Finally, it provides teachers with data that clearly shows overall development in language learning. The study also demonstrates that journal writing acts as a bridge between students and teachers, and leads them to better rapport and mutual understanding.

The developmental aspects to be focused on are not only in students' journal entries, but also in the attitude of students and teachers and in the classroom. Although these will be dealt with separately, it is evident that the relationship between them cannot be neglected.

The nine subjects of the study are classified as 'able', 'average' and 'less able' students. A brief overview of the students and their learning context will assist in understanding the reasons behind the development of these students more clearly.

There are a number of descriptions and definitions of development in this study, given that individual improvement may take place in a number of different ways.

Method, learners and learning context

General context

The institution in which this study has been carried out is the preparatory school of Dokuz Eylül (9th September) University, Izmir, where a proportion of the student population consists of post-graduates who are planning to engage in various masters programs in English, and undergraduate students who will have the opportunity to study in the English medium in their selected departments. The students are placed in classes according to their level of English as determined by a placement test given at the beginning of the year. The main aim of the department is to enable students to have a command of English good enough to use in their further studies. To achieve this aim, students are given four courses - main course (general English), reading, writing, and video/listening/speaking.

Writing course

For the last two years there has been a focus on the process-oriented approach in writing classes. One reason for this is the collective experience of students and teachers. Many students, due to a national education system that encourages rote learning and paraphrasing rather than creating and searching, have complained about the inability to write, even in their own language. Students when asked to write about a given subject were unable to attempt the task unless they had knowledge of the topic. In other words, most of our students, especially undergraduates, were scarcely able to compose a piece of writing that reflects their ideas and feelings. On the other hand, they were quite good at answering questions and filling in blanks prepared on a specific text, and copying a given model.

With the process-oriented approach students have been introduced to new concepts such as draft writing, peer response, and evaluation. They are given the time and opportunity to select topics, generate ideas, write drafts and to revise and provide feedback.

Once or twice a week students are asked to use ten to fifteen minutes of their writing lesson for writing entries in their journals. Journals are notebooks in which students keep write anything that comes to mind. Each entry gets a response from the teacher in written form. Journals and class notebooks are kept separately.

Students

The particular group targeted in this research project consists of 24 post-graduate students; nineteen of who are environmental engineers; two are geology engineers and three are mechanical engineers. They all started the academic year as 'false beginners'. Of this group of nineteen, nine were singled out for detailed analysis. None of these students were familiar either with the process-oriented approach or journal writing at the beginning of the year.

Research methods

Detailed analysis is carried out on nine sets of journal entries. The teacher gives a response to each entry. Towards the end of term, students were observed writing their entries during class time, and observations duly noted. At the end of the term, journals were collected and two questionnaires given to the students to obtain feedback. Teacher feedback was also obtained at the end of the year.

Observations - Changes in entries

1. Starting writing

The objective of the writing course in the aforementioned department is "to help students to become skilled writers." To be able to see if students improve as "skilled writers", terms need to be defined and conditions of teaching and learning need to be considered.

Since students are asked to use the first fifteen minutes of a lesson to write in their journals, they do not have time to spend on thinking about the topic and planning their approach. Therefore, they do not have the chance to use different strategies to help them. However, they are expected to use some strategies with which they have become familiar in their formal writing lessons. Although they do not have a chance to review what they have written until they get a response from the teacher, they are given ample time to compare their piece with the teacher's.

Under these conditions, normally, a "skilled writer" is *expected to be able to start his entry with no confusion. He should be able to see his weaknesses and try not to repeat them.*

When looking at the students' entries, the result is quite surprising. Students who do very well in formal writing lessons seem to have problems in starting their entries since they find it difficult to choose a topic. In observing these students in the classroom, it is of note that several minutes are spent in thought before writing. However, the same students have the ability to question their weaknesses verbally both inside and outside the classroom. As a result these students do not errors. The following is an example from Hasan Sarptaş, who spends a considerable time starting to write his entry and in checking his writing.

Journal entry 02.02.96

".....because most of them are very specific. I don't know enough English to explain them. Some of them are very common. Even if someone doesn't an environmental engineer, he/she can know a lot of things about them.. So, choose a subject to write essay is very difficult."

Journal entry 03.02.96

"I chose two subjects to write an essay. These are classical treatment methods and pollution prevention methods. I want to write a good essay."

Journal entry 07.02.96.

"... If someone is an environmental engineer, doing this is very difficult for him....."

On the other hand, students who are poor performers in formal writing lessons start writing immediately. They are not concerned with "errors". Their attitude seems to be that they are primarily concerned with answering the teacher's previous response. They wish to carry out a written dialogue with the teacher. However, their errors are relatively consistent over time. The following are extracts from Gül Kirhan's journal entries which show a great deal of "subject-verb agreement" violation, although she is quite able to use more difficult 'wish' and 'regret' structures.

Journal entry 20.03.96

" I think I wish I had got a computer. But in Turkey a few people has got a computer..... So all of the students has to go private courses...."

Journal entry 03.02.96

".....In Turkey a lot of problem isn't solved. People are selfish. Türkiye is a country where person's life isn't important....."

Journal entry 16.02.96

"In Turkey there are a lot of place which a lot of people do not know. I used to climb on the mountain when I were at the University.....As long as this programme finish I will jump the mountain."

Journal entry 07.03.96

" I decided to write about valuable stones. It is the most interesting subject in Geology. World of stones are very different and very interesting."

Journal entry 09.03.96

".....I talked about valuable stones in the Main Course lesson. I know that I made a lot of mistake. Although I am afraid of talking in English I could talk. You always said that you talk in English but we didn't do it. I regret not talking in English."

Journal entry 10.03.96

" I want to writing to you about valuable stones: Stones have got a lot of different colour.....For example although saphir and yakut has got different colour they are the same stone which is called corundum...."

A second student, Tolga Toydemir, who starts writing immediately, seems to attach very little importance to accuracy and spelling in writing his entries, most of which are humourous. He is prone to switching to Turkish words in order to avoid adaptation. He achieves flow without accuracy.

Journal entry 20.03.96

" I have to write Turkish (somewhere) because you won't understant If I write english. One day 'Bukalemun' had three baby. They called 'Sukelamun,' 'Okalemun' What do you think of the 3rd name of the baby? That was 'Hasan'

Journal entry 16.04.96

*"What is "kurgu"? That is past tense of karga.
I had time to play basketball. I participate a tournament."*

Journal entry 24.04.96

" While I was coming here, I had an anectode in my mind, but I forgot it. It was nice one . If I remember soon I will explain."

Under the aforementioned conditions and according to the above definition of a "skilled writer", Hasan seems to be making the most progress. However, the second group (Sengül and Tolga), although their performance in formal writing lessons is relatively poor, seems to be more fluent. Their errors may be dealt with individually.

In view of these observations, the definition of "a skilled writer" might be modified to "someone who is ready to realise the primary purpose for writing, i.e. the exchange of information and ideas with the reader with speed and a liberal attitude towards errors." In this way, the second group is also developing as skilled writers. A common perception of the skilled writer is one of a student who focuses on common and entrenched errors, and often devotes time to planning an accurate piece. As a result, praise is often given to students who focus on form rather than conveying meaning.

Students such as Hasan seem eventually to adopt a different purpose for writing. Consequently, they may make more errors but are more spontaneous.

Journal entry 12.04.96 *"I don't write any letters to you for a long time,. Therefore, I'm sorry. But you know too, my mother had an operation. She stayed in hospital in two weeks. Although her illness is uterus cancer, she is in good health today....."*

2. Changes in quality

If as Richards says, "written language employs a different syntax and vocabulary from spoken discourse" (101: 1992), and if "the goal of written language is to convey information accurately, effectively and appropriately and to do this written language has to be more explicit than spoken discourse," (ibid.), then students who do not employ such syntax and vocabulary should not be accepted as having achieved anything in writing. In other words their pieces lack quality.

In the very first entries of students, the impression is that the choice of topic is conscious, primarily in order to use a recently learnt structure. In the following example written by a relatively good student, traces of the lesson in which the Present Simple Tense and its use in daily routine were taught can be seen.

"My Daily Routine: I get up at 7.00. I wash my hands and face. I have breakfast and eat something and drink two or three cups of tea. I usually go to school by bus. I get on the bus at 8.00 and I get to school at 8.45. I learn English from 9.00 to 15.00. I have lunch with my friends at school at 12.30. I sometimes do shopping. I arrive home at 16.00. I study English and I read a newspaper or a book and watch television. I have dinner at 9.00. I go to bed quite late." (Written by Hasan Sarptaş)

The student's purpose here is clearly to practise the new structure (the Present Simple Tense for daily routine) to demonstrate his ability to the teacher. The sentences are grammatically accurate, short, but serve the need of the student perfectly well. In terms of quality this particular student has achieved something, and the piece does not lack quality according to Richard's assertions. However, the same student produced a very different piece two months later:

Tomorrow is 24th November- Teacher's Day. So I want to congratulate your teacher's day. Because you are very successful, cheerful and kind. These aren't courtesies. These are reals. I'm liking your "teach English method". I'm learning a lot of important points about English with you. You won't be here tomorrow. So I want to give this writing, today. Moreover I saw your son yesterday. He is very likable and beautiful. I like him. so do all my classmates.- I'm sure it! Last, I congratulate your teacher's day again. (By Hasan Sarptaş)

In this piece, the student very clearly wants to talk to the teacher. The underlined words show how many times the writer addresses the reader. In line 4 "with" gives us a stronger feeling that the student is really trying to communicate with the reader. The topic of the entry is more of a shared experience. In comparison with his first piece, the second is full of inaccuracies. Accuracy is secondary to purpose, even where simple structures seemed to have been mastered ('I'm liking your "teach English method."')

Another good student, attempting to use a previously taught structure, wrote the following piece. The underlined sentences show clearly that the student had studied models provided in the formal writing course and was able to produce similar sentences.

My name is Hülya Boyacıoglu. I was born in Germany in 1974. I have got one sister and one brother.

My brother's name is Umit. He is 13 years old. He is going to middle school. He is tall and very thin. He has got short fair hair and blue eyes. He likes to play games and to make pictures with a pencil.

My sister's name is Hayal. She is 23 years old. She graduated from Ege University. She is a istatikci . Now she is a master student. Every morning she goes to office. After she goes to school, she is very tired. But she likes to work in an office and go to school. She is tall and slim. She has got longish, black, curly hair. Her eyes are green.

I am an environmental engineer. But I wanted to be doctor or an airhostess when I was a child. I wanted to be a doctor. Because I happened to wear a white shirt. But now I am wearing a white shirt for my job.

Two months later the same student produced the following piece:

Do you have any pets without your dog. I have got a parrot and a love bird. Called Cingöz and Minnos.

My love bird has green feather (hair). Its head is yellow. It is very funny but it doesn't speak My parrot has green hair too. But its beak is read. I bought it one month ago. It eats an apple, cracus, wheat .

(Everypeople who see it while it is eating an apple interests.) I am not sure this sentence true or not.

Because it eats an apple with legs. It uses legs. It looks very clever. But says only " Gak". Sometimes I think. It looks like a chicken. Because it doesn't do anything without eating.

The second piece starts with a direct question to the reader (the teacher). Hülya also turns the topic into a shared subject by asking this question as the teacher's previous response had mentioned a pet dog.

In an ideal communicative classroom, students are expected to ask for information and express an opinion either agreeing or disagreeing with their peers and the teacher. They should also be "guided to go beyond memorised patterns and monitored repetitions in order to initiate and participate in meaningful interaction." (Kumaravadivelu, 1993)

In the above examples, although the students do not seem to " go beyond memorised patterns and monitored repetitions", two months later, they manage to exchange ideas with the teacher, and even to "initiate and participate in meaningful interaction." Therefore, the pieces these students produced can be said to form "a class of communicative events" (Swales, 1991:45)

In both students' entries, there is no improvement in the quantity of the pieces. Hülya wrote fewer sentences in her later entry and Hasan had the same number of sentences in the second example. Nevertheless, these students have reached the point at which they are able to interact meaningfully with the teacher. As Balliro points out:

"It (journal writing) acts as a heuristic for thinking and knowing. It allows for the struggle required to make meaning through language - particularly new language... It provides each of us - students and teachers - a vehicle for knowing each other not only in terms of language and writing proficiency, but also in terms of our needs, interests, fears, and strengths." (1989; 85)

Once it is seen that there is communication then it is easier to recognise the purpose(s) of this communication, though the purpose for the teacher and the purpose for the students might appear to differ. At first sight all the entries suggest that the students' common purpose is to practise their English and improve their use of the language through writing. However, all the following extracts appear to have another common purpose; the sharing of and exchange of ideas with the teacher.

"....Everybody is bored from lessons in my class. Nobody wants to come to school. So, am I . If my masters isn't depend on prepare lesson, I don't come to school."

" ...Do you know what the computer is? (I don't know whether this sentence is true or not?) If you don't know it, you have to read the next page....."

".....At the beginning of the year I didn't know anything about English and I was very worried, you know that....."

".... You active and reat in the classroom and we too. If you doesn't behave like this, we will not behave like this, but I'm pleased with the situation. You is like my friend. I love she. I think your character is very complicated and renkli like my friend."

" ...I wrote something until now. I hope when you read them you aren't bored. I'm sure I had done a lot of mistake..."

"I know I have written to you my boyfriend and my mother therefore I'm very sorry. But if a person who is in my life is ill, I can't think anything except them."

In responding, the teacher, on the surface, aims to help students to improve their English. This matches the students' primary purpose. However, the teacher is also obliged to meet the students' communicative demands. Thus the purpose is recognised by all members of the discourse community. That community has created its own sociolect from the idiolect of each individual member. It is evident that the journal writing process provides us with a 'journal entry genre', where a genre " comprises a class of communicative events, the members which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes recognised by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre." (Swales, 1991: 58)

All members of this group of students managed to participate in a discourse community towards the end of the term, an achievement which could not be met in their other courses. Willis points out:

"We best learn a language by using that language rather than simply by producing examples of it for the teacher's inspection and correction. Broadly speaking such an approach is referred to as communicative, since it is based on the use of language to communicate." (1990)

The majority of language teachers claim to base their lessons on a communicative approach. Journal writing provides both students and teachers with opportunity to use the language communicatively with relatively little effort as students are not attempting to "produce examples of the language they are learning for the teacher's inspection and correction."

Having established a journal-writing genre, the quality of writing becomes easier to assess. Although the above pieces show little or no grammatical development, the later pieces certainly exhibit the desired characteristics of the genre type.

" disorder, imprecision, recursiveness, complexity, individual variation - that is the stuff of a process - oriented approach to writing. What we, as teachers, should be aiming at is creating an environment in which our students, rather being intimidated and frustrated by the complexity of writing, are engaged in and enthused by it, and where they feel that credit is given for every aspect of the effort which goes into the writing process." (White and Arndt, 1994: 6)

3. Changes in quantity

Students are given ten to fifteen minutes of a class hour to write their entries. Under these circumstances, "good" students might be expected to write less in quantity as a result of time spent on thought processes. Students who commence writing at once would be expected to produce longer pieces. However this is not always the case as the latter group often lacks the language to produce longer pieces. Pieces produced in the first month of the study demonstrated that "good" students are still able to produce longer entries. For example, Hülya, as a "good" student, wrote the following piece, only the second entry in her journal:

"Some people says the most friendly people in the world are Turkish. But I am not have this idea. For example a person who is ill goes to hospital. Anybody help him(her). Always doctors or nurses say' there are lots of sick person. We help only some of them. We cannot help all of them because we are people'. I don't believe most of them. Because they only wanted to earn more money.

There are a lot of similar people. We meet them everywhere. for example in the school, in the offices, in the bus, taxi.

Because of them I have got several friends. Some people seems to have a lot of friends. Sometimes I think I am very pessimistic. I must be optimistic. There are a lot of similar people in this school: I don't want to believe. Because some of them talk a lot Only they want to busy people. I hate them."

Compare this with an entry from another student:

"I want to sleep now, but I can't sleep now. Because I have six lessons today. I'm very boring. After the lessons finish Demet and I go shopping. I have an exam today so I'm excited. because I didn't enough understand:

Our teacher is very lazy. I hope she doesn't want to teaching. I wish she wanted to teaching."

However, another student, absent from class for most of the first month, produced the following initial entry:

" Nowadays, I'm not before. I'm feeling insensitive myself . I'm feeling myself such a (robot). (Aslinda) There are something that are about my mother, my boy friend and me. my mother had an operation 13 days ago. It is important for her life. I'm very sad about her. There was (tümör) in her thick intestine. I hope it isn't bad (huylu). We are waiting result of experiment. It will be in Ankara. Therefore I didn't be (consantre) to this term: There isn't a lot of wanting to come to school."

The last of these entries is particularly interesting, in that the student produces a reasonable amount of language, and in an attempt to adapt to the writing process, uses Turkish as a device to maintain the flow of the piece. The student clearly has a communicative purpose. The same student produced the following a month later:

"He will go to the doctor again today. He is going to Devlet Hastanesi again but I don't want to go there him because they don't interested in their sick. Although he has got a lot of pains, he isn't doing anything and they aren't doing anything as well. I want to be with him now but I have to attend to lessons to learn for him. Latter I'm going to tell him. So he won't miss the lessons that he doesn't come."

This piece is uses more complex sentences and, in talking about a partner, contains a narrative element. Using Turkish words still does not bother Nilgün. On the other hand, Tugba still uses very simple sentences and chooses the easy way and tells about only her feelings using "I" in nearly all sentences.

The following piece tells a complete story:

" Last night I went to Atatürk Kültür Merkezi: There was a show which belonged to Ege University. according to my opinion it was a wonderful show. Because I like to watch folklore. Students clothes were very beautiful. Their colours were red, yellow and green. I thought that n that years physical apperance was more important for people. If that people continued to wear that clothes we have to pay a lot of money for clothes. In the middle of the show three men started a show. One of them was blind, one of them was deaf, the other one was defected. It was interesting play: I laughed at them a lot." Show finished at about 11 o'clock . After I had come home I went to bed. Because I was a bit tired. Now I'm tired too."

Observation of students in the classroom and careful scrutiny of their entries lead to these conclusions:

Students whose aims are to please the teacher and complete the assignment showed very little development in the quantity of their writing. Quantity may be closely related to attitude to both journal writing and to learning English in general.

There is a close correlation between entry length and personal or narrative content.

There is a sense of freedom in both topic and structure as pieces increase in length.

Longer pieces provide the teacher with a better understanding of the students' linguistic competence.

The concept of a good writer in a second language usually coincides with the notion that the learner should be able to produce a text which will have features similar to a piece produced by a native speaker. In a traditional form-dominated or product-oriented approach:

"since the interest is in how sentences and paragraphs are written rather than what ideas are expressed, each piece of writing serves as a vehicle for practising and displaying grammatical, syntactic and rhetorical forms." (Raimes,1991)

In a process-focused approach, on the other hand:

"writing is far from being a simple matter of transcribing a language into written symbols: it is a thinking process in its own right. It demands conscious intellectual effort which usually has to be sustained over a considerable period of time." (White and Arndt, 1994:3)

The implication here is not that form should be completely neglected in a process approach, but that teachers should avoid treating a piece of writing primarily as a source of grammatical errors. Such treatment obscures the communicative aim and shifts the focus towards form rather than content.

4. Changes in accuracy

Errors

Questions remain regarding the level of accuracy that might be expected at the end of process-orientated instruction. Development in writing clearly includes an accuracy-based component that might be assessed in terms of learners' ability to correct errors by a process of comparing their own pieces with the teacher's responses.

This study uses an error categorisation system (Kroll 1994: 114) and charts the percentage of these errors over a period of three months (Table3). Students are categorised into three ability groups (less able, average, able) according to their performance in formal writing and main-course tests. Error analysis is limited to structures identified in the entries of nine students. Table 1 shows the average number of items used in which errors are counted.

TABLE 1

Students:	Less able			Average			Able		
Month	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Number of sentences	56-58	55-57	62-65	58-60	56-58	55-59	66-68	53-54	56-58
verbs	60-64	66-69	73-75	68-71	75-78	73-78	91-93	76-79	82-85
adjectives	9-11	8-9	11-13	9-10	9-12	13-14	14-15	13-14	16-17
adverbs	1-2	2	3	1-2	1-2	3-4	2	2	4
relative cl.	0	0	2	3	3	3-4	8	6	6
passive v.	0	0	2	0	1-2	4-5	4-5	4	6-8
preposition	5	10-12	17-19	9-11	18-17	14-15	22-23	22	16-18
link words	10	6-7	10-12	12-14	9-12	16-17	8-10	8-9	14-15

Table 2 shows the number of sentences using seven different tenses by the students from the three ability groups. The figures show the average percentage in each group.

TABLE 2

Tenses		Pres. simple	Pres. prog.	Past simple	Past prog.	Pres. perfect	P.Perfect prog.	Past perfect	Future forms
Months									
Less able	1	66 %	8 %	23 %	3 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
	2	48 %	4 %	38 %	2 %	2 %	0 %	0 %	6 %
	3	36 %	8 %	32 %	6 %	4 %	0 %	0 %	14 %
Average	1	74 %	8 %	14 %	1 %	1 %	0 %	0 %	2 %
	2	61 %	4 %	22 %	3 %	3 %	1 %	0 %	6 %
	3	20 %	2 %	44 %	12 %	8 %	2 %	2 %	10 %
Able	1	72 %	6 %	10 %	4 %	2 %	0 %	2%	4 %
	2	30 %	3 %	27 %	16 %	8 %	3 %	3 %	10 %

3	17 %	3 %	42 %	10 %	8 %	4 %	2 %	14 %
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Table 3 shows the type of errors focused on in each entry over a period of three months. The figures show the average percentage of the errors seen in each category. The figures represent the average percentage of errors for the three students in each ability group. Interpretation of figures in Table 3 requires constant reference to Tables 1 and 2 in order to gain a clear picture of developments in grammatical accuracy.

TABLE 3

Students: Month	Average			Able			Less able		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Word order	6.8	5.1	0	6.2	0.2	0	0.8	0	0.2
Missing verb	1.7	0.3	0	0.3	0	0	0.2	0	0
WUO adjective	18.1	9.2	7.6	18.0	9.0	7.0	14.2	11.0	7.0
WUO adverb	5.0	0	0	0	0	2.5	0	0	2.5
WUO rel clause	—	—	33.3	0	33.3	0	25.0	18.8	9.09
WUO passive	—	—	0	0	—	0	0	0	12.5
Subj-vb conflict	3.4	3.1	0	3.4	2.8	1.2	1.2	0.8	0.8
WUO vocab	5.2	2.8	2.8	4.0	3.6	2.0	3.6	3.2	1.8
WUO link words	15.0	14.7	18.2	8.3	7.1	5.8	0	11.1	13.3
WUO prepos'ns	20.0	16.6	5.2	23.07	25.0	23.5	10.0	22.2	26.6
WUO tense	12.5	11.5	5.1	8.4	5.1	4.8	29.0	3.7	3.2

(WUO = wrong use of) (Figures are shown in %)

Overall, the above results shown in lead us to the conclusion that it is inappropriate to label students as "able", "average" and "less able" when all show some kind of development in the use of certain grammatical structures, prepositions and conjunctions. Interestingly, the so-called "less able" students seem to take more risks and show more development than the "average" and "able" students. Possibly, those students who exhibit a higher level of existing language competence are content to use language that they already know rather than take. Ability, then, might be better measured in terms of risk-taking, use of 'new' language and progress rather than against a pre-existing measure of competence. It should be remembered that "...neither students nor teachers should expect sudden miracles to occur, such that elementary students suddenly become intermediate level writers as a result of activities they have engaged in. What processed-focused activities will do is to help students develop in ways which are appropriate to and fulfilling for their level of language proficiency." (White and Arndt, 1994; 6). Thus, credit should be given to any effort students shown in becoming good writers and learners.

Writing teachers are responsible for providing the tools required for grammatical accuracy? The weaknesses shown in the above tables indicate that it is an area that should not be neglected. Students are also expected to produce accurate pieces for certain examinations. Batstone explains: "we will need an approach which allows a focus on grammatical forms, but which at the same time retains a measure of self-expression and meaning-focus. If we can achieve such a balance, then we can help guide the learner to appreciate and use grammar as a communicative device, encouraging a richer deployment of grammar in more subtly regulated process tasks. But this focus on form will have to be by, rather than for, the learner, and the attention to meaning and self-expression will have to involve the learner quite directly." (1994: 99) We need to recognise that: "Grammar is important - but as a tool, a means, and not as an end itself." (White and Arndt, 1994: 2). As Raimes points out: "Despite all the false trails and some theorists' desire to offer one approach as the answer to our problems, what seems to be emerging is a recognition that the complexity of the writing process and the writing context means that when we teach writing we have to balance the four elements of form, the writer, content, and the reader. These are not discrete entities." (1991)

L1 interference

Behavioural and pedagogical changes through diary writing have also been called 'developmental', in that they lead students, in Selinker's terms, to "meaningful performance" (1972), described as a "situation where an 'adult' attempts to express meaning, which he already may have, in a language which he is in the process of learning" (ibid). This attempted production of a target language norm of learner's results in an observable output that his/her interlanguage system is based on (Selinker). Turkish students, as seen in some of their extracts, may use Turkish words or translate their intended meaning from Turkish to English awkwardly. The reasons for this often lie in insufficient level of linguistic knowledge, the influence of their educational background in L1 writing, or the differences between the two languages.

Some students tend to use Turkish words when they do not know the English equivalent, but never use a complete Turkish sentence in any of their entries. This is not L1 interference or language transfer in that it is a device that avoids interrupting the flow of writing. Discourse needs to be examined as a whole in terms of errors and overgeneralisation of structures. "It is now widely accepted that the influence of the learner's native language cannot be adequately accounted for in terms of habit formation. Nor is transfer simply a matter of interference or falling back on the native language..."(Ellis, 1995:301). Selinker maintains that: " If it can be experimentally demonstrated that fossilizable items, rules and subsystems which occur in IL performance are a result of the NL, then we are dealing with the process of *language transfer*." (1993:37)

The concept of Interlanguage, however, differs according to the setting in which English is being learned. This study has a foreign language setting in which "teaching English will depend on translation from L1 to English". (Richards, 1993: 88)

In an EFL setting, the term "interference" has limited relevance, since students are often not familiar with the differences between two grammatical systems. Students logically use the system they are familiar with, in this case the Turkish system. The error types seen earlier provide clues to the way that students systematise language, but are not the only source of information in a contrastive analysis.

The most problematic structures seem are those which do not have exact equivalents in Turkish. A prime example is the "present perfect tense". Although students seem to answer test questions adequately using this tense, they are unable to use it in a real context, resorting to linguistic devices in their own language which perform a similar function, i.e. simple past tense or simple present tense in conjunction with time markers:

"I won't continue with the 'Scarlet letter'. I always believed that I will learn English very well. ..."
(by Çiler Taban)

"...Because I like seeing different places and different people. But I don't do what I just said....."
(by Tekin Yildirim)

"...I went to my friend's birthday yesterday. We know each other for five years. We are very good friends." (by Sevinç Kendik)

Students also tend to use the 'present progressive tense' instead of the 'simple present tense' as a result of direct translation. In contrast to English, 'verbs which refer to actions that do not require a deliberate effort' (Collins Cobuild Students' Grammar) *can* be used in the continuous form in Turkish. Thus, the following errors in journal entries are common:

" I can't study enough for me. My sister saying ' you must take lessons.' But I'm not thinking like that..(by Tuba Karaca)

In Turkish there is no difference between the informal use of "second" and "third" conditionals (These terms are used here as they are used in most text books, and students are familiar with

them). Journal entries again show that in this case there is an attempt to use these structures in the way that they would be used in Turkish.

"...There were two sentences in that lesson about Volkswagen. I prefer first one. If I gave some information about Volkswagen in my writing I would prefer first one because if I write second one, nobody read all essay....." (by Tolga Toydemir)

"...In fact even if he goes to the doctor, his illness doesn't result. For this reason he can't do anything about his lessons...." (by Nilgün Köroğlu)

"....I think I won't any job after school. Because every environmental engineer can't find any job. That's why if I thought that I would sad." (by Neval Baycan)

Other grammatical areas present similar problems summarised in Adjemian's approach, as mentioned by McLaughlin:

"The structures of the interlanguage can be 'invaded' by the first language. When placed in a situation that cannot be avoided, the second-language learner may use rules or items from the first language. Similarly, the learner may stretch, distort or overgeneralize a rule from a target language in an effort to produce the intended meaning." (1993:63)

Less able students show a marked tendency towards overgeneralization of rules, A case in point is are the past and participle form of verbs, as seen in the following extracts:

"I gived up my boy friend six days ago. Both I'm worried and I'm happy. I'M worried because I miss him. I'm happy because I'm free anymore....."

"...I'll miss him. I'm afraid of loneliness. If I'm leaved alone, I may go back to my old boy friend....."

"....I forgetted my homework too. But I'll do it lunch time. I don't like homeworks."

Another common strategy is avoidance. As Ellis points out: "Learners also avoid using linguistic structures which they find difficult because of the difference between their native language and the target language. In such cases, the effects of the L1 are evident not in what learners do (errors) but in what they do not do (omissions)." (1995: 304), and "it only makes sense to talk of avoidance if the learners *know* what they are avoiding." (Ibid: 305)

Even able Turkish students tend to avoid using complex structures such as as relative clauses, despite familiarisation and practice in other lessons. Turkish is a left-branching language, and Table 3 shows that the number of relative clauses used is the result of avoidance rather than unfamiliarity.

Turkish students have found a way to express themselves in journal writing with the help of their own language. Particularly at the beginning of the year these students produced pieces that would not be taken into consideration by teachers who insist on the use of English in their classes. However, However, despite the use of L1 transfer in journal entries, There is a case even for the use of bilingual dictionaries. A study carried out by Friedlander shows that: "translation from the native language into English appears to help rather than hinder writers when the topic-area knowledge is in the first language. Writers would thus lose little by writing in their first language and then translating into English at the appropriate time for their emerging texts." (1994:124)

Journal entries are not "organised essays". However, we should give credit to students' attempts to communicate with the reader. L1 transfer does not act as a barrier in conveying messages. On the contrary, these "cognitive strategies" (Selinker) help students to communicate with the reader. 'L1 interference' is an inappropriate term in this context.

Cultural and political backgrounds also affect students' writing. Turkish students have a culturally specific attitude towards writing in that they tend to be less direct than English

writers. For political reasons, many Turks have found a way of expressing their feelings and ideas about things, people and events through indirect explanations based on shared cultural knowledge. Thus, often, a student's writing might seem unclear to a native speaker of English. Explanations tend to be metaphorical and even poetic. These extracts are taken from journal entries written by Volkan Çeçen:

*"I'm ashamed to carry the people from shore to other shore. I think I will have to sail to ocean."
"Very often I find the people who listen my contrast. Suddenly I remember the sea that waits to pour out my feelings, opinions, worries, pleasures, excitements, inclinations. At first my comrade listens to me very silently. Then it responds soundly to my question with the help of the rough.. It advises me to share everything with people."*

"I'm afraid one day the sea my comrade will be offended me. What will I do at that time I wonder. I am not sure whether it helps me or not whenever I want. Maybe I don't have to trust it. I think it's about time I learn to share everything with people."

Simple sentences, avoiding some structures and choosing easy topics are also the result of this approach. Turkish students are very sensitive to readers' reaction to their pieces. There are two basic reasons for this: one is we are not very open to criticism and the other one is we do not like to hurt the reader's feelings. Notably, L1 transfer does not disappear, but becomes part of a student's strategy. Eisterhold summarises: "(1) there must be a mechanism by which we can discover similarities between languages, or synthesis; (2) there must be a mechanism by which we can reconstruct our experience to allow for interpretations of second language input; (3) for the sake of cognitive efficiency, there must be a mechanism that allows strategies and information to be shared across languages." (1994: 98)

5. Changes in attitude

Writing classes are often perceived as dull and difficult. Indeed "certain cognitive psychologists have described it as the most complex and demanding of all cognitive activities undertaken by human beings." (White and Arndt. 1994: 12). Widdowson remarks "... writing is usually an irksome activity, an ordeal to be avoided whenever possible. It seems to require an expense of effort disproportionate to the actual result." (1993:34)

This rationale underlies attitudinal problems towards writing. Complaints about writing are many and various, but commonly students are unwilling and teachers are depressed. A typical initial reaction to journal writing from Turkish students is "I can't write in Turkish, let alone in English". However, attitude may change, and such changes are often related to topic and teacher response. Change in attitude go hand in hand with increased rapport and mutual understanding. Scrutiny of students' journal entries provides a number of indicators of change in attitude.

Changes in topic

"Writing is far from being a simple matter of transcribing a language into written symbols: it is a thinking process in its own right." (White and Arndt, 1994: 3) and it takes rather a long time to show students that through their thinking (and learning) process "The writer, and the writer alone , is responsible for the text which eventually evolves from the raw material" (Ibid:5).

Unfortunately, at the outset of the writing process, the "raw material" for students is "entirely from external sources"(ibid). The use of external sources does not hinder the production of good pieces as long as they allow students (or students allow themselves) to be creative. When students begin journal writing they are we unfamiliar with the process, the major problem being 'what to write'. 'Able' students tend to spend time finding a topic to suit the use of recently learned while others begin to write immediately. A minority of students is able to find topics related to themselves or which facilitate communication with the teacher. The following are extracts from journal entries written at the beginning of the process:

"I wrote first letter. Now I'm writing second writing. I want to write letter but which about topic. I don't know. Finally I prefer to write about listening to radio and watching TV." (by Tekin Yildirim)

" I will write The hound of the Baskerville summary. In September, in Basker Street, London, Holmes and Dr Watson who is Holmes' assistant were waiting for a visitor who was Dr Mortimer....." (by Tolga Toydemir)

" When you want me to write something in ten minutes I can't remember anything. I want to tell you a story about Temel." (by Hülya Boyacıoglu)

" I want to tell an advertisement. An old woman walking in the street. The street is very crowded and there is air pollution. She is bored." (by Sevinç Kendik)

Given the problem of topic choice, the following short questionnaire was administered:

Put a tick in the box next to the answer which best suits you:

1. When you were given a writing assignment before, how often were you allowed to choose a topic to write about?

always sometimes rarely never

2. Did you like the topics you were asked to write about?

always / sometimes / rarely / never

3. Did you know much about the topic you were asked to write about?

very much/ enough / not much / did not know anything at all

4. Were the topics given in your interest area?

always / sometimes /rarely / never

5. Were the assignments corrected and graded by your teacher?

always / sometimes / rarely / never

6. Were you happy with the pieces you wrote?

always / sometimes / rarely / never

The results show clearly that students are accustomed to, and gain little enjoyment from, being given topics about which they know little. Over time, the shift in topic towards the familiar lead students to feel comfortable with the idea of writing for ten to fifteen minutes., the rationale being that the self is a known quantity. There is however, a question regarding the concentration on the personal, in that seemingly creative writing exercises "can lead to an avoidance of the central problem interactively ... because they encourage communion with self rather than communication with others, and represent writing as personal rather than a social activity" (Widdowson, 1993). On the other hand, intention to interact with the reader seems to increase over time, and it would seem unfair to the students not to see their pieces as more than "the business of putting words on a page becom(ing) not a social activity but a long exercise: a manifestation of linguistic rules for display and not a realization of linguistic rules of communication." (Ibid: 44).

In summary, there appear to be the following associations with change of topic:

1. There are more grammatical errors in later entries.

2. New vocabulary and structures are used more often despite an increase in errors.

3. The reader begins to be addressed in person by use of the personal pronoun 'you'.

4. The message to the reader becomes clearer.

5. There is increased enthusiasm for responding to the teacher.

On a subjective level, the sharing of personal thoughts, feelings and experiences may also indicate the acceptance of the teacher as a 'reader' rather than an 'assessor'. White and Arndt

point out "This technique has been found to be an effective and productive means of arousing interest in writing, which at the same time develops fluency of expression. It also helps students to become aware of why they wish to communicate their ideas, and to regard writing not merely as a means of personal expression, but also a dialogue in written language with the reader" (1994: 64)

Teacher attitude

Until very recently, the product or outcome of writing has been the sole focus in terms of achievement for both teachers and students. For many teachers achievement is synonymous with accuracy in grammar and organisation within a text. Any piece of writing is still treated as "a source of language error." (White and Arndt: 1994). As Zamel points out, "Teachers are still concerned with the accuracy and correctness of surface-level features of writing and that error identification - the practice of searching for and calling attention to error - is still most widely employed procedure for ESL writing". (1985), while research into teacher response behaviour that: "ESL writing teachers misread student texts, are consistent in their reactions, make arbitrary corrections, write contradictory comments, provide vague prescriptions, impose abstract rules and standards, respond to texts as fixed and final products, and rarely make content-specific comments or offer specific strategies for revising the text." (Zamel 1985: 86)

In the EFL setting, problems tend to be exacerbated as "the major source of the input for English is the teaching manual and the teacher" (Richards, 1993: 89) and the expected output is as close to the input as possible. This, of course, results in classes of students "who approach the task of second language learning" (and also writing) "as one in which the ability to state grammatical rules is the perceived goal. Unfortunately, this kind of explicit knowledge about the language does not necessarily guarantee ability to use the language with grammatical accuracy." (Tarone and Yule, 1991: 70)

These students do become "on the basis of their particular training, highly skilled at choosing correct answers on discrete-point test systems" but "display very little skill in producing or understanding the language." (Ibid:71/72)

If the result is not promising, a focus on form is questionable. One reason for the continued insistence on accuracy is the ease with which a teacher can compare a student's piece with a piece by a native speaker of English. Since students can copy models without being creative, they are merely providing the teacher with "a source of language errors". A second reason may be the teacher's unwillingness to give up their role of the ultimate authority and of "linguistic judge" (White and Arndt).

Traditional attitudes are often based on false expectations. Students are disappointed not to receive direct error-based feedback even complain about it. Most of them think they will never be able to "write" in English, meaning, in fact, "writing like a native speaker of English". These expectations unfortunately make writing a frustrating activity for both students and teachers.

Teacher response

The problem may be alleviated by a shift of focus in writing to meaning from form, allowing both teachers and students to depart from their traditional roles. Journals are accepted as one "vehicle through which learners can express their concerns and interests." (Isserlis 1989:51) The ability to do so requires conditions of comfort and security. Security is fostered by avoiding 'red pen' correction". As Raimes puts it, "Correcting is not all there is to do. If we want our students to keep on writing, to take pleasure in expressing ideas, then we should always respond to the ideas expressed and not only to the number of errors in a paper." (1993: 267)

One way of responding to students writing is to reply as if answering a letter. Errors are dealt with by using a correct form in the response in order to provide a model. Keeping journals requires interaction in terms of writing and response between students and teacher to be able to realise communicative teaching situations. The analogy is with a dialogue in which one interlocutor waits to speak until the other has finished.

The response the teacher gives also promotes the acquisition of the forms and syntax of the written language as well. Focusing on meaning does not mean neglecting form completely. On the contrary, students have a chance to see correct forms of their errors and even encounter new forms in a real language context. As a result, they "overcome their fear of written form of a (foreign) language and increase their self-confidence and willingness to write." (Jones, 1989: 106). Zamel points out that: "to respond by participating in the making of meaning means that we no longer present ourselves as authorities but act as consultants, assistants, and facilitators...., we need to establish a collaborative relationship with our students, drawing attention to problems, offering alternatives, and suggesting possibilities. In this sort of relationship, student and teacher can exchange information about what the writer is trying to communicate and the effect that this communication has had upon the reader..." (1987: 97)

This change in relationship between teacher and students presents risks for both sides. "This will, inevitably, involve some degree of self-disclosure in which teachers and students move beyond a conventional, relatively impersonal teacher-student relationship into territory where different rules apply." (White and Arndt, 1994:2)

Generally, however, a response will motivate students to continue their interaction with the teacher. Enthusiasm for reading the teacher's response is generated. The relationship established through entries allows the sharing of feelings and ideas with the teacher. A balanced approach to responding, "would give students a fresh start and aid in confidence building." (Gallagher 1993: 18)

Teacher reactions

In traditional rote-learning based systems, journal writing and a focus on process represent major change and innovation. Agreement to participate in journal writing may be superficial on the teachers' part, leading to an incomplete approach. Focus on form may still prevail, and it is not uncommon to see journals checked and corrected. Major shifts in attitude take time and perseverance. A colleague says:

"In the beginning I did not think writing journals would last long because I had sixty students and even to think about writing response to them was killing me. Would I have enough time to do this? But suddenly I found myself reading these journals even at breaks.... The intimate relationship established between me and my students now makes journal writing very attractive for me and hopefully for the students." (Müjdat Sönmez)

Another colleague openly admits:

"I did not think I would be able to do it at first. Too much work. It needed a lot of time. On top of it students did not look enthusiastic about it. Some of them even said it was unnecessary. They thought it would be so boring to write about their monotonous daily life. But when they read what I wrote to them they started to change their mind about it. ... Now I have a chance to follow their development step by step. Also I can give direction to each individual in class differently." (F. Aysun Kizgin)

As Zamel puts it:

"In light of what we can learn from and teach each other during this reciprocal, dialectical process, we should all begin to re-examine our typical approaches to responding writing and attempt to teach, ... We should consider how we can respond as genuine and interested readers rather than as judges and evaluators. ... We should try to respond not to secretaries but to authors. ...we should respond not so much to student writing but to student writers." (1985: 97)

Student reactions

Students who are used to having their errors corrected find it difficult to accept pieces written by teachers as responses to their writing. When asked for reactions, students came out with comments such as:

" I think it will be better to be corrected in red pen because I can see our mistakes easily."

"If you correct our mistakes in red pen everybody understand their mistake. Because we read only read it."

" When I didn't being corrected with red pen I thought my teacher hadn't read enough my piece or it is perfect."

However, three months into the study, students seemed to have changed their ideas:

"Your sentences are samples for me. They are correct and in the different style"

" When I read your response I realise what are the mistakes, sometimes I can't express my feelings and I understand it then."

"Red pen shows student is unsuccessful. But I don't see this in your answer. This is really good."

The classroom

The relationship between the teacher and students becomes more intimate through journals. This intimacy is carried over into the classroom. Students who feel embarrassed or afraid to speak openly to the teacher become more comfortable. Journal writing may not be the only factor in this change, but it may play a key role. In the Turkish system, where the teacher is the ultimate authority, cultural factors prevent from becoming involved in such a close relationship with the teacher. Journal writing, however, encourages students to identify other roles performed by the teacher, and opens up an avenue of approach. A colleague explains his student's anxiety in facing a new approach to writing:

" What I gathered from their questions was that their anxiety stemmed from their experience in the system. ' What kind of language should I use to the teacher?' 'Do I know enough English to tell him all I have in mind?' 'What if he finds a lot of mistakes in my writing?' However, the offered free atmosphere sounded very attractive to them. Still it did not stop them asking questions like: 'Is that right that only you are going to read them?' or ' Can we really write about our personal lives?' (Müjdat Sönmez)

After some time, however, in an atmosphere of relative trust, students appreciate the new relationship:

"First it was difficult to write my thoughts on a paper. I worried my sentences were wrong. Now I think it is very good. It gave me a good habit. I started to write things which I don't say to anybody. Sometimes I try different writing styles. It relaxes me.

"When I first started I thought it was not necessary. We didn't gain anything. But my ideas changed now. I think I do a good thing. When I give my notebook to my teacher. Sometimes we don't write. I want to write. We warm for the lesson too."

"When I first wrote what I thought at that time I tried not to make any mistake and to write very well. Because I thought I would warned about my mistakes and the teacher would think that my sentences are very simply When I understand it wasn't I wrot more comfortably. Now I'm not afraid of it. It is an opportunity to write my feelings to write on a notebook."

A writing course should provide teachers with advantageous input: "stimulus material for activities, correct models of language use, a topic for communication, opportunities for learners to use their information processing skills and opportunities for learners to use their existing knowledge both of the language and the subject matter." (Hutchinson and Waters, 1992)

Student entries and teacher response together seem to provide us with all these advantages, in turn leading to increased enjoyment and willingness to learn.

Conclusion

There are always alternative approaches to a problem. This study suggests that journal writing may be a promising alternative or complement to standard modes of developing writing skills, if implemented with commitment.

Journal writing allows students to express their feelings about topics, which are both meaningful and important, in a context that is neither threatening nor evaluated. Students develop confidence both in themselves and in their writing ability. There may also be positive effects on learning strategies and a tendency for students to take more responsibility for their learning. Journal writing is free from compulsion, and not confined to particular structures or vocabulary, giving students the opportunity to choose the content of their learning. The communicative purpose influences the need for specific language. Not only does journal writing promote acquisition of the forms and syntax of the written language but also allows students time and context to practise what they have already learned.

Using journals in the classroom produces changes in both learning and teaching. Students demonstrate different changes and "development" in their learning of a new language. Changes in their attitude towards writing lessons have also been observed. There seems to be an increase in enthusiasm for writing classes, while a closer relationship with the teacher appears to be established through the "dialogues" in journals. Reading students' journals provides the teacher with the opportunity to see where individual students stand on the learning curve, to analyse strengths and weaknesses, and to gain feedback on the effectiveness of particular lessons and to plan according to developmental needs.

The scope of this study is inevitably limited. Areas such as contrastive rhetorics and literacy transfer have been left untouched, as has the notion of change in coherence in journal entries. The research process parallels the writing process in that doors leading towards further development remain open.

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